

A Soldier's
story ...

Pride starts within



SGT Bryan E. Toler helps crew members install an antenna on a Patriot launcher station during march order and emplacement. (Photo by SGT Valenzuela, U.S. Army)

Some Soldiers, both officers and NCOs, have trouble finding “pride in service.” Pride, to me, is an undying devotion to duty that includes pride in what one does, what one says, what one wears and how one fights for his country. Having pride in your service — whether air, water or land-based — can win or lose a war.

Anyone can say he has pride in service when he is standing on the parade field watching a pass and review. The color guard passes, the spectators rise, they salute the flag and most feel an overwhelming sense of honor and duty to country; it is obvious they feel pride.

However, can those same officers and NCOs find that same pride in service when they are being held back in the field for another two weeks because they didn’t qualify their on gunnery tables? Some leaders do and can, others don’t or can’t.

Respect. Pride in service should start with personal pride, and that type of pride can be defined in many ways. But for me, it is a feeling of self-respect and personal worth. So, by my definition, one really needs to look inward first to have pride in service.

So how do you achieve this? I think it starts with self respect, but ends with respect for my seniors, peers and subordinates because everyone is an essential part of the team. No one has a job that is too small. They all must be done correctly and efficiently to accomplish the mission. Knowing this, a Soldier can expect no matter what mission is assigned, whether it is a fire fight with an unknown enemy or a necessary, but tedious task, he can accomplish his mission with a sense of pride.

Just ordering Soldiers to have pride in service doesn’t work. One can’t expect the junior enlisted Soldier or a newly commissioned officer to have the same level of self respect, personal worth and pride in service as seasoned Soldiers do. They haven’t had the

chance to develop it yet. That’s the “catch 22;” pride in service doesn’t develop overnight or within a few short months. It must be developed through time, experience and service. To achieve it for themselves, Soldiers at all levels need to see it in action within their chain of command.

Training. It is the NCO’s job to take care of his Soldiers, but often leaders get bogged down in daily tasks such as mandatory unit training or seemingly endless list of unit taskings. So due to the “daily grind,” a leader may forget to provide the simplest form of training, but one that can be the most important, which is developing pride in service in their Soldiers.

Yes, pride in service can be taught. It comes when leaders teach their Soldiers how to overcome adversity, how to show heart and motivation when the going gets tough and, lastly, how to wear the uniform properly and with the pride it deserves.

As an NCO, if I can pass on these lessons, self respect and personal worth, then I’m confident my Soldiers will learn to have pride in service as well. It is my personal responsibility, because each Soldier under my charge and who is fighting for his country — despite hardships and regardless of military occupational specialty — deserves to have pride in service.

Soldiers who learn these basic skills can tackle any challenge because they will have the right frame of mind. They also can make the right decisions because they will know they are serving something that is bigger than themselves. They are serving their country. They will know their decisions can bring either a negative or positive light on the uniform, their unit or their country, and that will make a difference to them. That’s what pride in service is all about.

NCO’s role. In this modern age, it’s tough to find external sources for pride in what Soldiers do. During WWII, the Soldiers had a clear cut enemy and reason to fight. The simplest minds could grasp the good versus evil concept. Today’s counterinsurgency operations, however, thrust our Soldiers into an environment where there is no clear enemy. Protecting civilians may require our Soldiers to battle insurgents, hunger, poverty or even misinformation campaigns. There is not one set “task, condition and standard.”

So NCOs must find ways to mitigate the effects a nonlinear counterinsurgency war has on their Soldiers’ morale, and ultimately, their pride in service. Leaders owe it to their Soldiers to do whatever in their power is necessary to improve their time in service. We must lead by example, fight for our Soldiers’ rights and, if the need arises, stand in front of the command sergeant major with them. Now is the time for a gut check and to show our Soldiers what pride in service looks like.

Start with the small things, because it’s the small things that make a big difference in the lives of our Soldiers. For example, the Soldier who struggled with physical training everyday, but never gave up and earns 287 points on his latest Army Physical Fitness Test. Now, that gives me pride to know I helped a Soldier achieve a goal that serves to promote self respect and personal worth and brings pride to the Soldier’s service.

That’s where pride in service starts — in your heart and that of your Soldiers. Can you give them what they need to go the distance? Teach them pride in service. ■

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